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## MODERN THEOLOGY

"Is **THERE** a God?" There were times when to ask this question was a sign of heterodoxy; to-day the fact that the problem is of interest brands one as a member of the small, diminishing, tolerantly-ignored group of theologians. Like fossils of a past generation those who still ponder over the deepest realities of the universe are treasured and kept in schools of learning. Their beliefs are the subjects of jibes and jests, the main use of which seems to be to supply material for the wit of able writers. The masses of the people pay lip-service to the belief in God. As a result politicians find it useful to be regular church-goers, and state papers and addresses of government officials teem with religious references, but these are not more meaningful than the references to the Greek gods that fill the pages of Milton. It is by poetic license that the name of the Lord is used, but with little conviction. This is, let us face the facts frankly, an age of materialism, a mechanistic epoch in human life. If the name of God did possess the mystical powers, attributed to it by medieval enthusiasts, of making chariots fly, of drying oceans, of building bridges across streams, or digging tunnels under them, it would be diligently studied, every fact concerning it would be known. But as the existence of God is a matter of interest merely to man's moral and intellectual nature, the deepest reality that the human mind has conceived, the finest thought that has ever entered the human intellect, the idea that has been a source of ethical power for man from the days when first he began to understand the world, will be left for examination by such as can live on crusts of bread and endure the derision and mockery of a world.

It requires some courage, therefore, for men to insist in these days on repeating the ancient formula, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One." It is not difficult to say the words when one is not listening to the words one is pronouncing, but to affirm with conviction that God exists, is nothing less than to throw down a gauntlet before the eyes of some of the dominant philosophies of the day. It is to declare some of the most famous sages deluded; it is to enlist for service in a great war.

Those who go forth to wage this war of the Lord will find themselves seriously handicapped by lack of modern ammunition. Their guns and powder as well as the rest of their ordnance is of the sixteenth century type. They are ill-supplied with twentieth century inventions like the submarine, wireless, airplanes, and tanks. The attempt that is constantly being made to win the naval battles of this great war with Greek triremes will never succeed. The *Mayflower* carried a few sturdy pilgrims; it would ill have endured the mass movements across the Atlantic that are characteristic of our own day. The attempt to carry on a modern theological discussion with arguments from Anselm, who died in the twelfth century, or with "proofs" which were shot to pieces by Hume and Kant, in more modern times, is worse than futile. In the face of attacks of the power of Bertrand Russell's *Free Man's Worship* we must have better arms than those which proved vulnerable before less formidable foes.

For this reason all those who aspire to a clearer understanding of the deeper truths of the universe will greet with pleasure the appearance of Sorley's *Moral Values and the Idea of God*.<sup>1</sup> The author calmly reviews the various proofs for the existence of God that have thus far been advanced, the Ontological, the Cosmological, the Teleological, and the others, and fearlessly faces the objections which have been raised against them and which account for their failure to convince the world. In marshalling these proofs and refutations the author often adds very interesting and stimulating thoughts of his own. The chapter containing these discussions, called "The Theistic Arguments," is one of the finest in the book.

It is not easy to do justice to the author's argument in the confines of a short review. He bases his assertion of the existence of God on the existence of *Values* in the world, which he considers as real and integral a part of the universe as the *Relations* which hold between its various parts. The author of course wrestles with the problem of evil, and comes to the conclusion that the universe is purposive rather than statically perfect; he asserts the truth of freedom of the will. There are a few flaws in the argument, which do not, however, completely invalidate it. It still remains to be conclusively proved that *Relations*

<sup>1</sup> *Moral Values and the Idea of God*, the Gifford Lectures delivered at the University of Aberdeen, in 1914 and 1915, by W. R. SORLEY, Litt. D., LL.D., CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS; New York: G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS, 1919. pp. xix + 534.

are real in the sense in which material is real, and what is even more doubtful is that *Values* are an integral part of the universe and not a figment of the human imagination. An even more serious stricture against the book will be raised by those who deny the truth of the Oneness of the world, and who accept James' doctrine of the Pluralistic Universe.

It is the last criticism that makes the book of very little use in America where students generally have come under the influence of the modern "Anti-Absolutist" schools of thought. William James has dealt a blow to Hegelian Idealism from which, in this country, it has thus far failed to recover. It is true that Royce, the colleague of James, was an able champion of this very philosophy, but whether it be, as Bertrand Russell claims, because of our concentration on the practically useful, or for some other reason, the influence of William James on the rising generation of the country has been vastly greater than that of Royce. Perhaps Idealism is too profound for us, but we, Americans, generally find ourselves either enmeshed in the web of Pragmatism, or irresistibly drawn by Henry Bergson's *élan vital*, or followers of the rising neo-Realist group. There are very few to-day who will openly declare their adherence to the philosophy of Berkeley, either in the Germanized form given it by Hegel and his followers, or in the re-naturalized English form given it by Bradley.

Unlike Sorley, Professor Macintosh does not try to prove the existence of God, in his *Theology as an Empirical Science*.<sup>2</sup> The author states that as every science must begin with an assumption of the existence of the material with which it is concerned, just as chemistry assumes the existence of matter "and its accessibility to human experience; and biology assumes the same with reference to life, and psychology with reference to consciousness, and sociology with reference to society" even so "theology as an empirical science presupposes the existence of the Divine objects and its sufficient accessibility to experience for the possibility of knowledge of at least some of its qualities and relations" (p. 90). Although the book is full of Christological references, a Jewish reader will find many chapters very interesting and important. The chapter on *The Problem of Evil* deals with that

<sup>2</sup> *Theology as an Empirical Science*. By DOUGLASS CLYCE MACINTOSH, Ph.D., Dwight Professor of Theology in Yale University. New York: THE MACMILLAN CO., 1919, pp. xvi + 274.

difficult matter in a popular and novel way. The book is full of inspiring thoughts for the theologian, whose problem is the clarification of the meaning of the Divine rather than the proof of his existence.

Of a somewhat similar character is the Reverend W. Powell's *The Infinite Attributes of God*.<sup>3</sup> This little book, with a name that sounds so medieval, is yet quite modern in many of its parts. The introduction, with its elaboration and attempt to modernize Anselm's Ontological proof of the existence of God, can hardly be said to interest the reader, but he who breaks through the cold name and the uninviting introduction will find himself in a most interesting discussion of some of the serious problems facing the theologian. The book is very well written, and contains many references to the classical philosophers and theologians which the reader will appreciate.

Like the two books just discussed, Clement C. J. Webb's *God and Personality*<sup>4</sup> undertakes to describe the character of the Divine rather than to prove his existence. The author gives a lengthy discussion of the character of personality, and then devotes a chapter to the discussion of the meaning of personality as applied to God. He assumes the existence of an *inner consciousness* of God in the mind of his readers, and therefore finds no need of doing more than cope with some of the problems that present themselves before one who is philosophically convinced of the existence of the Absolute, and religiously convinced of the existence of God. Even to those who are not adherents of the Absolutist philosophies, the religious paradox of the transcendence and the immanence of God forms a real problem.

The reviewer, being a Jew, cannot but call attention to Mr. Webb's exaltation of the Christian religions at the expense of all others. His test of the greatness of a religion is: first, its ability "to encourage, and be encouraged itself by, moral and intellectual progress among its votaries"; second, the greater or less extent "to which it exhibits the specific nature of religion, and not that of Science or of Morality as distinguished from Religion." With the first criterion no one can quarrel. But it is far from certain that "if we compare the religions of the world

<sup>3</sup> *The Infinite Attributes of God*, By Rev. W. POWELL, M.A., B.D. London: ARTHUR H. STOCKWELL, 29, pp. xxvii + 220.

<sup>4</sup> *God and Personality*, being the Gifford lectures delivered in the University of Aberdeen, in the years 1918 and 1919. First Course. By CLEMENT C. J. WEBB. London: GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN LTD. New York: THE MACMILLAN Co. pp. 275

on some such principle as I have just indicated, we shall, I think, have no difficulty in acknowledging that there is none that has shown more capacity for maintaining or even developing itself in the atmosphere of what would generally be admitted to be the highest moral and intellectual culture to be found at present in the world" than Christianity (p. 247). It is true that just at present Christianity is outwardly professed by many of the highest intellectually developed men and women of the world, but how many of them are its true adherents? Moreover, why should we neglect to take account of the centuries when Europe was steeped in the gloom of the Dark Ages, while Mohammedanism was professed by those who "had the highest moral and intellectual culture". Statistics are lacking, but it may be ventured that in proportion to its small numbers Judaism contains as many cultured and intellectually developed votaries as any other religion.

The second test, in spite of the author's devotion of two pages to its clarification, remains obscure. The distinction between Religion as Religion or as Morality or Science must always remain arbitrary. This is indeed hardly the time for theologians to engage in polemics with one another, or to measure their various religions by weight or length. It is high time that all who feel that the idea of God is an important factor in human morality, that its disappearance from the world would be an unequalled catastrophe, that its presence in the minds and hearts of men is a sign of hope of better days—it is time for all of those who cherish these beliefs to come together and save the belief in God. It is a heavy task that is laid upon the believers; it is a great battle that they must win. It were fool-hardy to divide their efforts now. It is no longer a question between Christian or Mohammedan or Jew; it is the question of winning the intellectual world to an acceptance of faith in God, and of winning the masses who profess the faith to carry out the ethical principles that follow from it in their daily life. To do this is a task that is well worth the life of the noblest of us. To succeed in that should be the aim of everyone to whom has been granted the vision of the power and truth of the Righteous God.

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